



# **Talisman Programs.**

*Exceptional Adventures for Exceptional Children!*

# Parent Handbook

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# Welcome Parents and Campers!

As parents you are an essential part of Talisman Programs. Talisman is looking forward to getting to know you and your camper! We have compiled this handbook for you so you may become acquainted with our programs and remain informed of the many details of camp that you might need throughout the summer.

Included in this booklet is information regarding contact, program policies and standards, activities, how to use Talisman's Insight-Oriented Group Process (the backbone of our program), our staff and schedule. Use this booklet to guide you through the summer as well as support your camper. Please call us if you have further questions. Through cooperation and coordination we can work together to provide your camper with a successful summer.

Thank you for becoming a part of the Talisman Family!





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## **AEG Mission Statement**

Aspen Education Group's mission is to provide education, treatment, and rehabilitation services to at-risk youth and their families, with the foundation of our success built upon quality, integrity, and dependability.

### **Aspen Education Group (AEG)**

Talisman Programs' parent company, Aspen Education Group or AEG, is an organization committed to improving the quality of life for youth and their families. Headquartered in Cerritos, California, Aspen operates over thirty programs in eleven states. Aspen has been providing innovative quality educational programs that promote academic and personal growth for over two decades.

Aspen programs have earned outstanding reputations that have fueled the growth of the organization. Today, Aspen employs over 1,500 employees nationwide. All of its services are integrated with a strong and effective self-growth program. As the leader in the industry, its programs are recognized as the standard for quality and value. AEG services range from community-based outpatient services to long-term residential treatment, and include a variety of therapeutic interventions including: boarding schools, special education day schools, and outdoor therapy, wilderness intervention programs. In 2002 and 2003, Eduventures named Aspen Education Group among the top 100 education companies, a leading independent research firm dedicated to the learning markets.

## Our Program

Talisman Programs provide opportunities for youth who struggle with the challenges of ADHD, learning differences, high-functioning autism, or Aspergers to develop physical and emotional competence and a more positive and confident self-image. We are summer adventure programs that teach life skills and emotional management and their application in real life situations. This is done through a variety of Challenge by Choice activities and use of the group process. Challenge by Choice allows a camper to set reachable goals and determine their own level of success through activities such as rock climbing, backpacking, and technical tree climbing. The group process involves using your peers, staff and self as tools for assessing your decisions and accepting responsibility for yourself and your choices. This is explained in detail in the Group Process section of the handbook.

During their stay at Talisman, campers have the ability to practice good decision-making as well as what to do when a poor decision has been made. This knowledge can be taken away from the program and applied at home and school to improve relationships with friends, parents and teachers. Most importantly, this knowledge allows our youth to feel good about themselves and be okay with their own differences. Talisman strives, above all, to provide a positive and fun environment in which our campers feel accepted and successful.



### Success

To laugh often and much  
To win the respect  
Of intelligent people  
And the affection of children;  
To earn the appreciation  
Of honest critics and endure  
The betrayal of false friends;  
To appreciate beauty,  
To find the best in others;  
To leave the world  
A bit better, whether  
By a healthy child,  
A garden patch  
Or a redeemed social condition;  
To know even one life has breathed easier  
Because you have lived,  
That is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Talisman Contact Information

**Address:** Talisman Programs  
64 Gap Creek Road  
Zirconia, NC 28790-8791

**Phone:** 828-697-6313

**Email:** [info@talismancamps.com](mailto:info@talismancamps.com)  
(To contact program managers, use their first initial with their full last name: [ltatsapaugh@talismancamps.com](mailto:ltatsapaugh@talismancamps.com))

**Contact Policies:** The directors of each program will call parents once a week to update you on your camper. Sight calls will be Monday, Base Camp will be on Tuesday, Insight and Academics will be Wednesday. Calls for the Teen Programs campers will be arranged with you on opening day. You are welcome to call or email us any day.

Campers do not use the phone unless they or an immediate family member have a birthday while they are with us. We find that phone calls exacerbate homesickness, while letters are a welcome connection with home that kids can reread and carry with them. We encourage letter-writing in both directions. You may also sign up for one-way emails to your child through Campminder (see below).

**Care Packages:** While our campers enjoy them, the added bulk can be difficult to manage in the cabin, so we ask that you send no more than **one care package** per session. **We do not allow food in any care packages**, due to limited storage, sharing issues, and nutritional concerns. There are a few great care package companies in our area that put together all non-edible care packages. We recommend The Wrinkled Egg, and have included their information in your confirmation packet.

### Writing Your Child

We encourage you and your family members to write letters to your camper; they look forward each day to mail call. Consider sending a letter before camp begins, to arrive on the first day (or give it to the counselor). Remember to put the camper's name and program on the top of the address (i.e., Susie Camper, Sight).

### Emails and Photos

We know how important it is to you to feel connected to your child while apart. We are happy to be able to offer you Campminder's One-Way Email program and Photo Gallery. Using the same secure user name and password that you used to enroll your child, you will have free access to our Photo Gallery, which will be updated throughout each session. You may also subscribe to the Email program, which allows you to send a certain number of one-way emails to your child. (We will not be printing emails sent directly to our email address.) **Please note that teen adventure programs do not necessarily have access to our one-way e-mail system.** You can access Campminder through our website: [www.talimancamps.com](http://www.talimancamps.com).

## Administrative Staff

### **Linda Tatsapaugh, Director**

*MS in Child and Youth Care Administration, Nova SE University; BA in Religion, Davidson College*  
Linda has served as the director since 2001. Previously, she worked at Stone Mountain School from 1991 to 2001, as a counselor, program director, HR, and admissions director. She is an instructor-trainer in First Aid, CPR, lifeguarding, and crisis management, and is a tree climbing facilitator. She thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail in 1990, is a board member of the National Association of Therapeutic Wilderness Camps, and is the mother of a 7-year-old son, Gable.

### **Aaron McGinley, Summer Program Manager**

*MS Mental Health Counseling (In Progress); BA Psychology and Human Services, University of Scranton*  
Aaron has been working with children with special needs for nine years. During that time he has worked in residential treatment facilities, group homes, and hospitals. Aaron joined Talisman in 1998, serving as a Base Camp counselor and staff supervisor. He is a certified lifeguard. He is an instructor in first aid and CPR, suicide prevention, and crisis management.

### **Laura Centers, Admissions Director**

*MA Special Education (k-12), University of Phoenix; BA Psychology, Western Washington University*  
Laura began working with autistic children in high school. She joined Talisman in 1998, working with youth with ADHD and learning disabilities. She served as an autism advocate for Stone Mountain School, while working with the TEACCH center and NC Autism Society. She developed and launched Sight, a summer camp program specifically for kids with autism spectrum disorder or Asperger's Syndrome. Once she earned her masters, Laura taught for 2 years in an autism classroom in the public school system and at New Leaf Academy for girls. Laura enjoys spending time outside with her husband and son, and their dogs!

## Our Counselors

All counselors are hired following an extensive application, interview process, and background check. All are in college or have graduated from college. Most have degrees in fields relating to childhood development, psychology, social work, or outdoor recreation. We hire as staff adults who exhibit compassion, enthusiasm, an understanding of human development, patience, good humor, a willingness to learn, and a desire to make a difference in a child's life. Many counselors are planning to enter related professional fields, and come to Talisman to build their experience.

Talisman trains staff for two weeks prior to the campers' arrival in information regarding your camper's safety and emotional needs including: camping skills, wilderness first aid, lifeguarding, van driving, crisis management, group facilitation, and the daily routine. Teen program staff have extra training in wilderness first aid and documented experience in backpacking, paddling, and trip leadership. TOBA staff are also trained in Swift Water Rescue.

## Medication

Many of the Talisman campers take some form of prescription medication; therefore, it is very important that the administration of medication be a safe and smooth process. For this reason, we have chosen to use CampMeds as the packaging company for all of our programs. You will need to send the prescription to them, where they fill and package the medications and directly send them to us. Each packet of medication has the day, date, time, child's name, doctor's name, and prescription to ensure no errors. Please refer to the CampMeds brochure and registration form for more information.

**Summer camp is NOT a good time for a med vacation!** If your child is usually on meds, please continue them for their time at camp. There are so many changes and stresses of coming into a new social environment, that chemical changes can really complicate things.

Campers are not allowed to keep any medications, even over-the-counter, on themselves. We provide all regular over-the-counter meds, such as ibuprofen and sunscreen.

Talisman Programs have a strict system in place to insure that each camper gets his/her medications timely and accurately. When your camper takes medication, it is our policy to watch while they swallow it. No camper is ever forced to take medication. If a camper refuses the medication, we document that refusal and inform the parents and the doctor. This is rare because once the ramifications of refusal are discussed (informing parents and doctor), campers usually decide to take the medications.

### **Camp Nurse**

We have a camp nurse on campus at all times. She will provide all care for a camper who becomes sick during camp. She will call you to update you if your camper becomes sick. The camp nurse will also make any decisions necessary for doctor visits or further treatment. In an emergency, we will immediately transport your child to the nearest hospital (fifteen minutes from campus) and contact you with a report as soon as we are able.

# Opening and Closing Day Procedures

Opening and closing days can be hectic and confusing. Follow these guidelines to help us ensure the smoothest possible transition to and from camp.

Make sure you have your map prior to opening day. Please note that MapQuest sometimes provides inaccurate directions. Call the day before if you have any questions.

Opening days for programs differ. Please check twice which days are opening and closing for your camper! Check-in times for each program are the same each session.

**CHECK-IN TIME:** *9am – 12pm for all programs*

**PICK-UP TIME:** *9am – 12pm for all programs*

## **Transportation Information**

**Please return the Transportation Information Envelope with your confirmation packet.** If your child is flying, please enclose the itinerary, the receipt for the return unaccompanied minor fee (or a check if you are unable to prepay), a photo of your child, and any spending money they might need on a return flight.

## **Airport Procedures**

Schedule arriving and departing flights **between 10am and 2pm**. If this is not possible, please call us to discuss the best options. We recommend unaccompanied minor service or passenger assistance, especially if your child has not flown alone or has some anxiety about the flight. We can provide you with names of staff who will do pick-up. Let us know ahead of time if you are using this service, and be sure everything is set up for the return flight. (Prepay if at all possible)

Our staff will meet campers at the gates, regardless of whether they have assistance or not. Staff will have Talisman t-shirts on. We will call you once we have your child in our care, so you will know they have arrived safely.

If you are flying *with* your child, please plan to rent a car and drive to camp. We will want a chance to meet your and show you around our campus. We cannot provide round trip transport to and from airports for parents.

**Fly into Greenville/Spartanburg, SC (GSP) or Asheville, NC (AVL)**

# Camp Life

## **A Typical Day**

Every day is different for each program. Most days for the Teen Programs involve a good bit of hiking, paddling or climbing, with group members increasingly taking charge of daily tasks. Base Camp and Sight groups usually get up, clean cabins, do morning chores, eat breakfast, and head out into their day's activity. This could be a field trip to a waterfall, rock climbing, tie dying, swimming, ceramics, or packing up for a camping trip. On-campus, meals are served in our dining hall, and groups take turns with kitchen clean-up. Group discussions happen throughout the day, to plan for the next activity, to talk about what we learned in the last activity, or to resolve an issue. Evenings are time to wind down and prepare for bed. Cabin and activity groups are age-based, allowing us to practice age-appropriate peer interactions.

## **Food Policy**

We do not use food as reward or punishment. We provide wholesome food that is generally familiar to kids (e.g. hamburgers, hotdogs, fresh fruit, sandwiches, bacon & eggs, etc.). We encourage them to try a no-thank-you helping of everything, unless they are truly allergic to it. They are given substantial first servings, and must try the (very small) no-thank-you helpings if they wish to come up for seconds, or to be eligible for the occasional dessert. We do have limited alternatives and will never let a child go hungry. We do not feed our campers much junk food and allow no food in care packages. We have vegetarian alternatives and can meet some special dietary needs, including GF/CF. If your camper does have special dietary needs, please call and discuss them with us prior to camp.

## **What To Bring**

You will find a complete gear list with your confirmation packet. The only exceptional items are a sleeping bag, hiking boots, and long johns (there are a few more small items for the Teen Programs). Please read the list of prohibited items before you and your child pack. Call if you have any questions concerning the gear list.

## **Prohibited Items**

- No weapons of any kind (including pocket knives)
- No drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, and drug paraphernalia
- No mouthwash, cologne, breath fresheners, mints, gum or candy
- No radios, CD players, CD's, or MP3's (if those flying bring them on the plane they will be held in the camp office until departure)
- No electric or electronic devices
- No personal food
- No money in personal space (any money brought will be held in a lock box in the office)
- No medication of any kind (staff must hold all medications, even over-the-counter)
- No unapproved clothing
- No aerosols
- No inappropriate reading material

Note: The best way to avoid having anything sent home is to stick with the gear list in your confirmation pack. If you have any questions concerning items to bring please call our office.

## Laundry

Each group does their laundry together, so please **have your child's name clearly marked** on each clothing item to prevent mix-ups. Every child should have a laundry bag, also clearly marked or monogrammed, in which to put their dirty clothing. Each group is required to bring down their laundry in the morning of their washing day and pick it up that evening or the next day to be folded and put away in their trunks. Campers with a bedwetting problem are assisted with washing their sheets every day that there is an accident.

### **A NOTE ABOUT CLOTHING AND PERSONAL ITEMS.**

Camp is a busy place. Over the course of a session, campers visit many places both on campus and off. This sometimes means that campers may misplace their personal items. Through our structured morning routine, close supervision, and seemingly constant reminders, we try our best to help our campers keep track of their personal items. However, campers will sometimes lose items. Although we cannot be held responsible for lost items, every possible effort is made to return *clearly labeled* personal items. Please do not send your child's best or most expensive clothing.

## Bedwetting

A handful of campers every session have a bedwetting problem due to medication or slow maturity rate. Talisman will work to help your child alleviate this problem as well as keep it discreet, but we ask that parents please notify us before your camper arrives that this problem exists. We also ask that you send an extra set of sheets with your camper so that they may have bedding when theirs is in the wash. The camper will be required to go with a staff each day that they wet the bed to the laundry facility to help take care of the bedding. We recommend that you discuss with your child the possibility of using disposable absorbent underwear, which we can manage discreetly. This is especially important for multi-day camping trips, when using sleeping bags.

# Homesickness Prevention

Homesickness is the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home (Thurber, 2005). For many of our students, building independence is a goal of being at camp. We believe that learning how to manage homesickness is an important step in building independence in our campers. Talisman has experienced supporting campers with homesickness for over 25 years and in partnership with families have implemented several effective strategies. It is important for both you and your child to know that the majority of our campers have some amount of anxiety about the transition to camp-life. This manifests itself both before camp and after arrival at camp. It is even more important to know that the overwhelming majority of our campers finish our camp having thoroughly enjoyed their experience! In fact, campers who initially were anxious about attending camp often additionally struggle with having to leave! In order to support you and your child in these moments, our staff are specifically trained to deal with the struggles of transition both to and from our camp environment. With the additional knowledge of recent research, and our own extensive experience, we feel that taking the following steps will help with alleviating potential homesickness:

- **Learn about the program**  
Spend time looking at our brochures and other informative printed materials, as well as perusing our website. This will allow you and your child to have a better idea of what to expect as far as the structure of our programs (i.e. where they will sleep, what they will eat, what types of activities they will participate in).
- **Practice time away from home**  
Practice makes perfect. Having opportunities for spending time away from home (i.e. for at least 2 nights) can support your child in making the transition to camp life. This could take place at a friend or family member's home, or other safe environment, which would give your child a chance to adjust to life outside of their regular home environment. To make it even more fun, have your child try out their sleeping bag (if never tried before), or even try setting up a tarp (what we use for hiking trips) to sleep under in the back yard. Make sure to debrief the experience with your child, asking questions about what went well and what may have been difficult about the experience.
- **Set them up for success**  
Part of having a successful camp experience is believing that it will be just that – a lot of fun, a new, positive experience, and again, a whole lot of fun! You can help your child get into this mindset by having talks about camp, discussing which activities they think they may enjoy most, and also asking what concerns they may have. However, beyond clearly hearing their concerns and discussing them rationally (i.e. “I really hear your worried about the hike and that others may go too fast - just remember that there will be other kids with the same worries... and, you can be assured that the staff will make sure the group travels at a pace that works for *everybody*, including you.”), you can additionally support them by avoiding making “I’ll come get you if you don’t like it” contracts. This type of a deal implies and presupposes that their camp experience *won’t* be successful. Instead, continue to be available to talk about both enthusiastic and nervous thoughts about what camp will be like, and help them to think about camp in a positive light.
- **Call or email our camp**  
Encourage your child to pick up the phone and call our staff (888-458-8226) or send us an email (info@talismancamps.com). Our staff are always available to talk with you or your child about what camp will be like, answer any questions, and help to support them in the transition from home-life to camp-life.

Thurber, Christopher, A., (2005). Multimodal Homesickness: Prevention in Boys Spending 2 Weeks at a Residential Summer Camp. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 73, No. 3, 555-560.

## Daily Schedule for Campus-Based Programs

**6:45** - Rise and Shine and dress for the day

**7:00** - Cabin clean-up

**8:00** - Morning group with your staff

*Discuss the day's activities and resolve any outstanding issues*

**8:15** - KP heads in to set up dining room

**8:30** - Breakfast

**9:30** - On-campus chores

*Check the schedule for your group's chore of the week*

**10:00** - AM activities

*Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activity*

**12:00** - Lunch group with your staff

*Discuss the plans for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the day as well as any concerns or issues*

**12:15** - KP heads in to set up dining room

**12:30** - Lunch for all groups on campus

**1:15** - Downtime in your cabin

*A great time for reading, writing letters or taking a nap*

**2:00** - Afternoon activities

*Check cabin calendar for your group's scheduled activity*

**5:00** - Evening group with your staff

*Discuss how the day's activities went- is there anything that needs to change? Resolve any issues*

**5:15** - KP heads in to set up dining room

**5:30** - Dinner

**6:15** - Announcements

**6:45** - Evening activities- Varies each evening

**8:30** - Showertime

**9:00** - In cabins

**9:30** - Lights Out! Sweet Dreams

# **Behavior Management**

We address issues when they happen, in “group”: we stop what we’re doing and circle up to identify the problem, have the camper take responsibility, come up with some better alternatives, and decide whether there is a natural consequence. Some examples: throwing food might mean eating the next meal separate from the group; horseplay in the van might result in missing the next van trip; being disrespectful may require apologizing and doing something nice for the other person. Group lets our kids practice expressing their opinions and feelings appropriately, and listening to others. Time-outs are used to allow people the chance to calm down and prepare to come to group. Sensitive issues may be dealt with one-on-one with a staff person. Yelling, punishment, and physical discipline are never allowed.

## **Natural Consequences**

Talisman Programs does not believe in using punishment to teach a child to make better choices. We use natural consequences so that a child can experience a logical outcome of his or her choice. We look at what would have happened as a result of the action and consider how to correct the problem. Examples include having to apologize for rude comments or doing extra chores to make up for refusing to do your own. It is also important that a child understand the effects on her own and others’ emotions during any interaction. In the case of a child making a negative comment to another, the child should be able to understand and see the reaction of the other child and then be able to do something that makes sense to make up for this, like writing an apology.

There is, conversely, nothing natural or logical to punishment. For instance, making a child run laps for throwing a stone at a building may make the child question why he is running the laps because it has nothing to do with throwing a stone. Rather the child may make a better connection if he is asked to stay out of the particular building or any building until he can learn to respect the property of others. It is always important to process a consequence with the child so that you know if he or she is connecting the issue with the consequence. This is done by first bringing up the issue to the child and asking if he or she knows why it is wrong, then explaining why you feel it is wrong and what you need done to make up for it. Once the consequence is issued, we ask the child why he or she is doing this particular action to make up for the issue at hand.

Natural Consequences are also wonderful to use in the case of a positive action done by a child. If a child has cleaned up his room without being told, he may be allowed more free time he has saved the group time in not having to remind him. It is good for children to understand that there is a natural outcome for everything they do, positive or negative.

## **Runaway Policy**

Sometimes a camper will choose to deal with stress (like being confronted by peers on an issue or feeling homesick) by leaving the situation. They are considered to be running away once they go out of staff eyesight without permission. Most campers will just seek a place to be alone. In that case, the counselor will follow the camper, have him commit to staying where he is, and attempt to discuss the issue or monitor at a distance if the camper just needs some space.

If a camper leaves the group, a counselor will follow. Our main purpose is to ensure the safety of the camper. Generally, they will soon grow tired and calmer and become open to conversation with the counselor, which usually results in turning around before long. Campers who run away are required to walk back as well. If the situation is deemed unsafe, trained staff may opt to restrain the camper to prevent him from going further while transport is arranged. If a camper were to leave unnoticed, the local sheriff would be called to assist in apprehending the runaway. This would only be grounds for dismissal if it were a chronic behavior. Generally, the natural consequences for running are to have to remain within arm’s

length of a counselor at all times, and maybe to work off the time they took from the counselor by doing a chore for the group.

## **Aggression Policy**

**Talisman maintains a policy and attitude of zero aggression, and habitually aggressive students are excluded from enrollment.** While our desire and intent is that aggression never be a primary issue, we are also working with students who have sometimes used aggression to deal with frustration. Therefore, we recognize that it will occasionally occur, and always confront it with appropriate and immediate consequences. These consequences may range from apologies and out-of-group time to 24 hours away from group and staff (with the exception of a supervising staff) to expulsion from the program.

If aggression is significant enough that staff and campers do not feel comfortable being around the camper, he or she is immediately removed to a primitive area (separation group) and given only the essentials necessary for health and safety (i.e. - a tarp for shelter, food, water, appropriate clothing for the elements, rain gear, and basic hygiene materials). An experienced staff provides supervision and counseling and will determine when the child is appropriate to return to group. The time at the primitive site is to provide for the safety of others and to allow the camper time to calm down, regain control of him or herself, analyze his or her actions, and demonstrate compliance with camp standards before rejoining his or her peers. The camper will practice using the group process and complying with camp roles while participating in campsite work projects. Our intent is to instill the idea that all social interaction, including camp, is a privilege earned through respectful behavior and compliance with publicly-accepted rules. This intervention may also be used with severely non-compliant, defiant campers who substantially disrupt the camp program. It is our goal to allow all campers to successfully complete their summer with us. However, if this intervention proves ineffective, we will discuss early dismissal with the parents.

## **Discharge Policy**

Talisman maintains the right to discharge any camper who is deemed inappropriate for the program.

**Parents will be notified 24 hours in advance that they need to remove their child from the campus.**

The Director or Program Manager will be in charge of this notification. Most campers give ample warning that they are inappropriate for the program through their actions, and parents will be notified immediately that discharge is a possibility. Once notification is given of the decision to dismiss a camper, parents have 24 hours, unless otherwise specified, to remove the child. Our desire and intent is for a child to never have to be removed from our program but even through a thorough screening process some inappropriate campers slip in. To prevent early discharge, we ask parents to please be very truthful when answering questions about their child, especially about aggression. Talisman does not want a child to feel failure. If a child does get discharged, Talisman will do all it can to recommend another program. No money is refunded for discharged campers. (Sessions not begun will be refunded.)

# Talisman's Insight-Oriented Group Process

Talisman Programs use a group format to deal with problem behaviors as they arise over the course of the summer. The process we use has been specifically developed to meet the needs of the campers who typically come to Talisman. Most of it will seem like common sense, especially to a parent of an exceptional child. The following explanation of group will help you understand how we work with your child, and if you choose to use this at home, can guide you in structuring your own groups. Why is this a good tool for you?

1. You **do not need advanced training** to run group (it is not therapy, it is problem-solving).
2. It supports your efforts by adding a **common structure for communicating**.
3. It is **simple** and your child has been practicing group for at least two weeks.

**Group has four major rules:**

- 1. Anybody can and should call “Group” if they cannot work out a problem immediately.**  
Unless safety or another serious issue is at stake, everyone should stop what they are doing and form a circle. On the way to group, nobody is allowed to discuss the issue. Once everyone is in the circle, silent, and has appropriate body language, the person who called the group can talk. (Nobody else talks until the person who called the group calls on him or her.)
- 2. Talk about one issue at a time.**  
When people are angry, they often want to bring up several intertwined issues at once. As we all know, this can be a problem because if we talk about many issues at once, none can get solved. This is particularly important to enforce with our children because their attention spans will give them a tendency to want to switch subjects quickly.
- 3. All members of group must use appropriate body language, low voice tone and appropriate words. No members may interrupt.** *(With the occasional exception of whoever is facilitating the group, interruptions should be few and far between.*  
You can call them social skills, you can call them social graces, but no matter what they’re called, everybody needs to learn those little nit-picky things that help you get along with others. Our kids are often not adept at the rules of conversation. They also may not fully understand the ramifications of doing something as small as taking their hands out of their pockets.  
  
You may literally have to teach them where to hold their hands when they are angry, or how to maintain appropriate eye contact. Furthermore, it is important to consistently review how good body language and voice tone are the keys to being listened to. If you are clear from the beginning about what you expect in this area, why you expect it, and what you can give in return, problems will be minimized. Also, remember that kids will be following your lead.
- 4. Ideally, all members of group must take responsibility for any inappropriate behaviors under all circumstances.**  
Our culture places a great deal of value on rights and freedoms. Sadly, this has sometimes meant that the value of responsibilities has been overlooked. Additionally, kids with diagnoses hear more about what they can’t do or are excused from doing than what they can do. This means is that your kids are constantly given subtle messages that they are not responsible for their behavior (e.g., “You can’t be calm, you have A.D.H.D.”). Children are quick learners, and they often learn that if that excuse works, many others can too (e.g., “He was cursing at me so I punched him...I am too tired, my meds aren’t working yet”). When these excuses are accepted, children often learn that they are not responsible for their behavior.

At Talisman, we emphasize that individuals can choose their behaviors. For instance, nobody can make another person yell and curse (Although, at times it may seem as if your kids are trying their

hardest!). We find this to be effective because it breaks down the myth that their behavior is not controllable. Once children can admit that they chose and can control a behavior, it becomes much easier for them to choose a more appropriate behavior the next time. Once children hold themselves accountable for their actions, it is possible to focus on changing their behavior. It is generally a good idea to be very consistent with this. In fact, until the behavior has been taken responsibility for, it is generally not a good idea to allow any comments or questions.

### **Step-by-Step Process of Group:**

1. Group is called - say “Group” in a tone loud enough that all needed for the group can hear. The person who calls group must be calm and in control of their body and state of mind, and ready to talk about the issue appropriately.
2. Come to group in silence - form a circle (the issue at hand should not be discussed until the group has officially started).
3. Name the issue - the person to call the group needs to begin the group by saying, “I have an issue on so and so for (insert issue here)”.
4. Resolve the group -The person who the issue is called on then has one of three options:
  - A. They may take responsibility for the issue at hand:** Which is the ultimate goal, by saying, “I take responsibility for (insert issue here) and in the future I will (name a positive way to deal with the issue in the future).” It is important that the child state what they *will* do, not what they *will not* do because the child needs to name a positive action with which they will replace the negative action.
  - B. They may ask for a time out.** If the child is too upset or refuses to deal with the issue, he may take a time-out. He needs to find an appropriate place within view of the guardians. He may not play and must return to the group as soon as he is ready to address the issue.
  - C. They may ask the person who called the issue to “please explain”.** This should occur if the child does not understand why the issue has been called. Using the term “please explain” is better than asking “why” because it is more respectful and does not allow for the child to make excuses for their behavior. Avoid this being used to get out of dealing with the behavior, by limiting the amount of times that this can be asked during one issue.
5. Issue Closed - Once the person has taken responsibility for the issue at hand and everyone feels good about the response, the issue may be closed by the person who called the group. If a natural and logical consequence is appropriate, assign it at this time. After closing the issue you may then call another issue to discuss or adjourn the group. Remember: Discuss only one issue at a time. Bringing up many issues at once may cause confusion and does not give the chance for closure on each issue.

### **Glossary of terms**

#### A Note On The Importance Of Language:

At times, the language used in group can seem tedious, if not mechanical. This is intentional: one of the goals of group is to take the complexities of problem-solving and break them up into steps that our children can handle. Many of you are familiar with the need to break down tasks into steps and give them one at a time. Your child may shut down if faced with the intimidation of dealing with some serious behavior; having a familiar sequence of steps gives them the power to work through the issue. *For instance, a camper may think, “First I need to take responsibility, then I need to accept a consequence, and finally I can express my frustrations to mom and dad.”*

The second value of the language of group is the need to form a connection between discussing a problem and using wisely chosen words. For instance, if a child is used to saying “I take *full* responsibility for...” in group, then she will be more likely to use that language in other situations. Imagine the difference in a teacher’s reaction to the following two statements said after a class period:

*“I’m sorry for acting up in class Ms. Johnson, I didn’t mean to.”*

OR

*“I take FULL responsibility for talking out during class, and in the future I WILL wait until the bell rings. Is there something I can do?”*

### **Group Adjourned**

This phrase is the last one spoken in group, and can only be stated by either the person with the last issue or the facilitator. (The “facilitator” is typically the adult. It is that person’s job to ensure that the “rules” of group are being followed. Children can facilitate the discussions if they have shown that they can respect the group process) “**Group Adjourned**” is used if there are no more issues, or if the facilitator feels that the group is not being productive.

### **I have a concern on \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_; I need for you to hear my concern.**

This expression is used when someone wants to express something that is not as substantial as an issue, but still needs to be expressed.

### **I hear your concern.**

This is the expected response if a “concern” is called on somebody. It is essentially a way of letting them know that you have listened to them, and can understand why they are be concerned. Saying this does not necessarily mean that you agree with the person but that you hear what they are trying to say.

### **I take responsibility for \_\_\_\_\_, and in the future I will \_\_\_\_\_.**

As explained above, this is the expected response when an issue is called on someone. It implies ownership of one’s behaviors, and a willingness to accept the consequences of that behavior. It also helps the person to think about more productive and positive behaviors.

### **Issue closed.**

This means that no more questions, comments, or concerns may be discussed around the issue at hand. It has been dealt with, and the group needs to move on to the next issue.

### **Natural Consequence**

This is a consequence, positive or negative, which is directly related to the behavior. An example is if somebody knocks over a trash can, his or her natural consequence may be to pick it up. If this was a consistent problem with the trash can, then the consequence may be to empty and clean the trash area.

### **Questions, comments, or concerns on this issue?**

This is generally asked after somebody has taken responsibility for an issue and a consequence, if any, has been assigned. While it is generally a good idea to allow questions, comments, or concerns, one must be careful not to let the comments distract from the original issue.

### **Please redeal.**

If for some reason, when the person assumes responsibility for an action, it appears that they were not serious, this phrase implies that the person needs to “deal” again. It can also be used if the new behavior named is not appropriate.

### **Words of Wisdom**

Remember, it is only the concepts of group which are important. We understand that you are busy and may not have time to hold “Groups” with your family all the time. At the same time, group can be an effective way of communicating. You may choose to use “Group” at some times, but not others. That’s OK. Size of group is not important; it could just be you and your child. You may choose to say “I can see we’re starting to fight; let’s handle this the way you did at camp so that we can work things out more quickly.” It will work sometimes, and at other times it may not, but it is a tool in your parenting toolbox that your child knows well. It is also important that all members of the family, including parents, hold themselves accountable in group. This means that your child may call group on you, and that is a very positive step, because he or she is choosing to communicate a complaint to you in an appropriate way. Your dealing in group both protects the integrity of the process and is a powerful role modeling opportunity.